

Experiences of on-line classes: students' perspective

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オンライン授業の経験：学生の視点

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Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system has experienced an unplanned and rapid move to online learning. The question is whether this sudden shift will result in an unsatisfactory experience for both students and educators or whether a new hybrid model of education with significant benefits will emerge. The main purpose of conducting this research is investigating undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of online courses, as well as investigating how on-line education, or at least some features of it, can be successfully incorporated in traditional face-to-face education.

COVID-19に基づくパンデミックにより、教育システムは計画外の急速なオンライン学習への移行を経験しました。問題は、この突然の変化が学生と教育者の両方にとって満足のいく経験や結果をもたらすのか、それとももっと大きな利益をもたらす、新しいハイブリッド教育モデルを生み出すことが出来るのか、ということです。本研究の目的は、学部生のオンラインコースの経験とその認識を調査するとともに、オンライン教育またはその少なくとも一部の機能をどうしたら従来の対面教育にうまく組み込む方法について研究することです。

Keywords : online classes, distance learning, student perceptions, ZOOM

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted teaching in a variety of institutions. In many countries, including Japan, traditional face-to-face teaching was replaced by online/remote education. It was quite a hectic time when teachers had to change from the traditional way of teaching, as well as students having to adopt to a new way of learning. Fortunately, the development of IT technology makes it possible to conduct E-Learning.

E-Learning refers to technology-based instruction in which the students are at a location physically separated from their instructors during the entire course of study (Ormrod, 2008). E-Education is not a novel method; however, E-Learning was not usually used as a sole method of instruction at most of the universities in Japan. Although E-Learning offers incredible possibilities, it also poses challenges: lack of social interaction, unsatisfactory learning due to unstable Internet connection, limited face-to-face communication, difficulty in maintains motivation are among them.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of online courses. Given the fact that there is an established correlation between student perceptions of learning environments and academic outcomes, this study investigated student perceptions of the quality of online classes.

Research design

Participants

The current study had 62 total participants. The participants are first-year and second year students majoring in languages other than English. Most of the participants had no prior experience of on-line education, while only 26% of students had some sort of E-Education experience before. In order to limit the influence of course content, students were instructed to give their overall impression of online classes without referring to any specific courses they had taken.

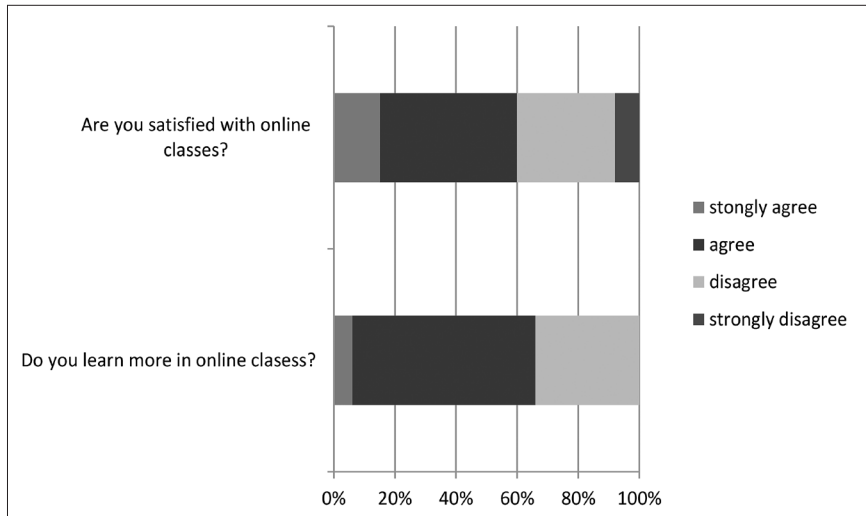
Procedures

Students who were willing to participate followed a link to an online survey. The first section consisted of a consent form; if they consented to participate, students responded to questions measuring their perceptions of general satisfaction, knowledge gained, motivation, communication with teachers and peers, feedback ease of online courses, ease of using ZOOM, as well as advantages and disadvantages of on-line classes.

A questionnaire was being divided into two sections, first section was consisted of ten multiple-choices questions, and the second section had two open-ended questions where participants shared their ideas/opinion about on-line education. Students were given one week to fill out the questionnaire. Only completed questionnaire were used for analysis. To analyze the data, there were two steps in this research. First was to calculate the percentage of student's answers, and the second was to conduct qualitative analysis of the student's answers.

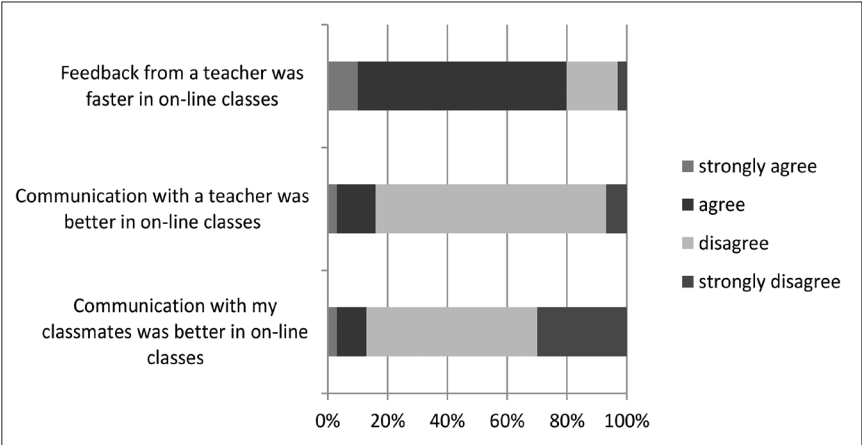
Results

Chart 1: Motivation and satisfaction of students in E-Learning environment



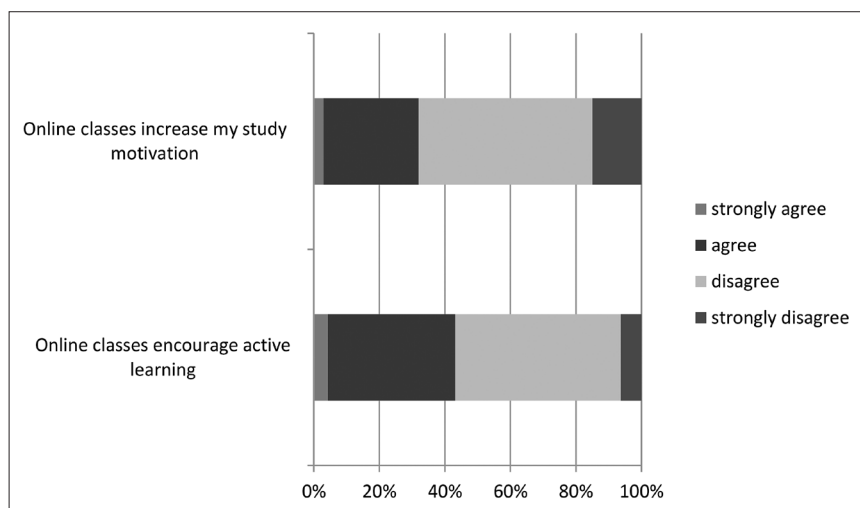
As it can be seen from Chart 1, more than 60% of students are satisfied with on-line classes, and slightly more than 60% of the students think that they learn more in on-line classes.

Chart 2: Communication with classmates and teachers



As it was mentioned before, one of the disadvantages of on-line education is social isolation, and the results from Chart 2 can prove it, as only 13% of students believe that communication with classmates is better in on-line classes than in face-to-face classes. The same can be said about communication between a teacher and students, as only 16% of students believe that communication in on-line classes is better than in traditional classes. Interestingly, the feedback that students receive is perceived better in on-line classes than in traditional classes. That can be explained because in on-line classes the feedback on students' assignment is given through email, learning platforms, such as Moodle, Blackboard, etc. instead of handing it back directly, so that might explain why students find the feedback is delivered faster than in traditional classes. Still what is missing is direct face-to-face communication, before, during and after classes, when student can ask questions that they might have.

Chart 3: Active learning and motivation

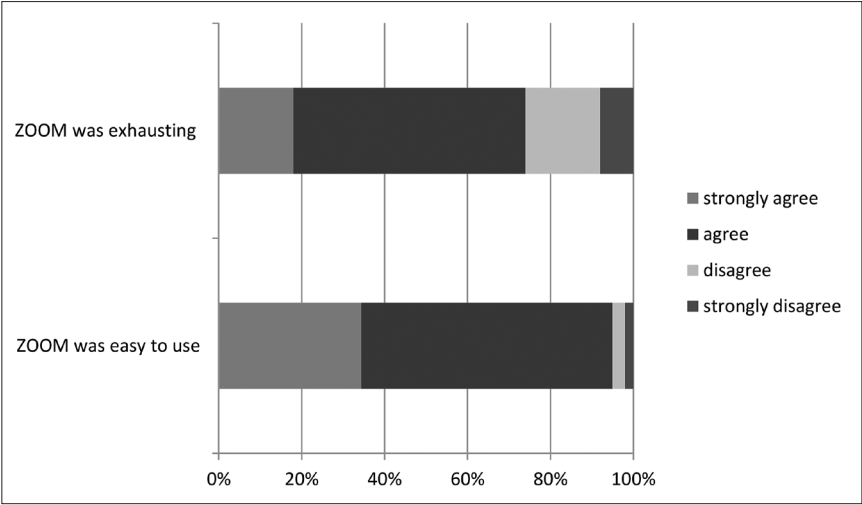


In recent years, *Active Learning* method is introduced in many universities in Japan. According to the survey conducted by the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) in 2015, 41% of four-year universities provide faculty development for promoting active learning methods, and 70% of four-year of tertiary intuitions considered to incorporate active learning methods into their curriculum. According to Bonwell & Eison (1991), active learning involves active participation of students rather than listening to lectures, with emphasis on the development of students' abilities and skills rather than simply delivering information. An active learning program promotes learning, during which students acquire skills for self-development and problem-solving. As Zimmerman (1989) stated, learners who can self-regulate their learning process are "metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skills rather than relying on teachers." As a result, students who use self-regulated learning strategies tend to have better academic outcomes.

However, only 41% of students believe that on-line classes promote active

learning. E-Leaning requires high level of motivation, self-organization, and time management. All these skills are essential in order to succeed academically while taking any on-line courses, but as it can be seen from Chart 3, only 32% of students think that E-Learning increase their study motivation.

Chart 4: Overall experience of ZOOM classes



One of the disadvantages of on-line education is a lack of face-to-face communication. One of the ways to deal with the negative effects associated with a lack of face-to-face communication can be introducing video chats, chatrooms, and platforms, such as ZOOM, Google Hangouts, Microsoft teams, Cisco Webex, etc. ZOOM was used as one of the methods of on-line instruction. Although there were many problems and still are with using this platform, especially security issues, they are out of the scope of this study.

As for the students' perspective, ZOOM was incredibly easy to use, as only 5% of students had difficulties in using ZOOM. Although it was easy to use, taking classes by ZOOM was exhausting for 74% of students who experience

what is now called *ZOOM Fatigue*. The main reason why ZOOM meetings can drain people's energy is because when people have in-person communication, much information can be picked up from the non-verbal cues. However, a video conference makes these in-born abilities impossible. Facial expression, gestures or body language are eliminated from ZOOM conversation, making this type of communication quite exhausting. Using multi-person screens magnify this exhausting problem. "If you view a single speaker at a time, you can't recognize how non-active participants are behaving—something you would normally pick up with peripheral vision" (Rasmussen, 2020). The result shown in the table above has reconfirmed that *ZOOM Fatigue* is real.

Chart 5: Perceived strengths and problems/limitations of the online learning

Perceived Beneficial Features of Online Classes	Number of participants mentioning*
Extra free time due to non-commuting	58
Flexibility, convenience, ability to do assignments at their own pace	16
It is easier to ask questions (some students feel nervous when they have to talk face-to-face), talk to more people than normally	8
Easy revision (as the materials uploaded on the website)	5
Easy to give presentations (easy to show slides, lack of public speaking nervousness)	2
Punctuality/ better attendance	2
Problems of Online Classes	Number of participants mentioning*
More writing assignments/homework assignments	3
Eye fatigue	8
One-way communication	14
Poor/Unstable Internet connection	23
Slacking/ bad attitude/ laziness	2
Inability to meet/ make friends	6

Perceived Beneficial Features of the ZOOM classes	Number of participants mentioning*
Sharing Screen	32
Chat	10
Breakout rooms	26
Easy to remember classmates names	2
Ability to see faces of all classmates at the same time	3
A poll function	1

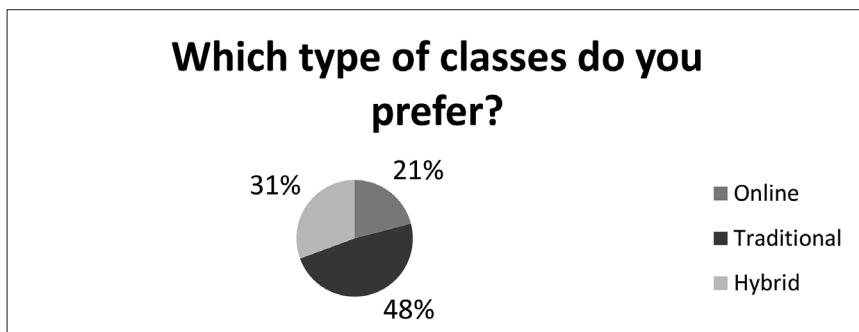
*This indicates the number of participants who gave one or more of the responses shown in each respective category.

The second section of the survey was open- ended questions; student were asked about advantages and disadvantages of on-line classes.

The most frequent advantages of E-Learning chosen by participants were extra free time (69%), flexibility (69%), the opportunity to learn at their own pace (64%), and access to the on-line materials (54%). Surprisingly some students mentioned that it was easier to communicate with classmates, as they did not feel nervous while giving presentations or they could talk to more people (in breakout rooms) than they would normally do. As for negative effects of E-Learning, the majority of respondents chose unstable or poor Internet connection (70%), one-way communication (54%), and a lack of social contacts with classmates. Some students mentioned that on-line classes demotivated them, made them lazy or even made them cheat.

As for the favorite features of ZOOM, the most beneficial ones were Breakout rooms and Chat; the features that promote some interaction between/ among students. Also students mentioned Sharing Screen that maked it easier to see the slides/ videos, as well as to show their materials (PPP, assignments).

Chart 6: Students' preference



After having one semester of on-line classes, almost half of the students still prefer traditional, on-campus classes, while one third believes that the combination of on-line and face-to-face classes is preferable. Only 21% of students would like to continue only on-line classes.

Discussion

The students' replies can provide some insights into their perception/ experiences with on-line learning, as well as can be used as a basis for decision making policy related to the implementation of online education. In general, students have rather positive perception of online learning, and they do not think that the quality of education has decreased much with implementing on-line classes. One of the positive effects of E-Learning is that students can learn in the comfort of their homes, and the time that was before used for commuting can be used for additional studying. Also with on-line education it became easier to access to class materials, as they are uploaded on the platforms, such as Moodle, Google Classroom, so students can get an instant access to such materials, study and review such materials at their own pace.

However, E-Learning requires self-management skills, time management skills, and ability to motivate oneself. Learners should also take an active learning position, become a real active learner, and be in charge of one's learning process.

The lack of these skills to learn independently can negatively affect students' academic performance, and most of the students do not feel that E-Learning promotes motivation and active learning habits/skills. Even some students mentioned with on-line classes it became easy to cheat, pretend to be present in the meeting while in reality doing something unrelated to the class. Continuously connected to the Internet with its various applications, SNS, etc., can distract them from classes. Also continuous use of the Internet can cause physical fatigue, especially eye-stain. In addition, poor quality of the Internet connection when students cannot hear or see clearly instructor's explanation or other students' presentation can cause frustration.

Conclusion

In this survey study, students' perception of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was evaluated. The on-line classes require from the students the ability for independent study and self-discipline, which can be difficult for students who are not accustomed to such method of learning. Although E-Learning has many positive characteristics, many participants found this experience rather solitary and exhausting, with many hours spending in front of their computers doing many written assignments. Although the overall experience was positive, only one out of three students would prefer to have all classes on-line.

On-line education was a great challenge for students; it might have been less stressful for them if some principles of on-line education had been introduced to them. Knowing techniques how to create a study schedule and plan for accomplishing their learning goals, how to use technology tools they need while learning on-line, as well as how to stay connected with their peers and instructors and maintain a healthy mind for effective online learning would definitely make on-line education experience more positive for them.

2020 academic year was for sure a great challenge both for students and teachers, however, it was a time when students and teachers tried something new precisely because they were learning/ teaching online.

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